

about LAb[au]

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LAB[au], Brussels

Since its foundation in 1997, the artists' group LAB[au], laboratory for architecture and urbanism, focuses on the link between art, science and advanced technologies. The group creates software art, has completed a number of large scale projects in public space and raises fundamental questions about contemporary art: what art can look like in the digital age and what impact have advanced technologies on our society, on aesthetics and on our understanding of art. It requires courage and an open mind to broach these actual themes in the traditional art world, so the work of the LAB[au] artists can justifiably be described as avant-garde.

Taking architecture as their starting point, the members of LAB[au] conduct an artistic study into the effects of computer and communication technologies on the notion and perception of space, its representation and on possible forms of interaction with people. The words Laboratory and Bau, which inspired the group's name, embody both the artists' purpose and working method, i.e. on the one hand, research, experiment and the pursuit of new forms of expression and, on the other, the transposition and execution of these ideas and insights. The word 'Bau' refers of course to the Bauhaus. On an art-historical and conceptual level,

LAB[au] is looking to link up with that tradition and also with the theories of Nicolas Schöffer, the 'father' of cybernetic art. His influence is particularly apparent in the kinetic installations Binary Waves and framework 5x5x5, both of which are based on the principle of interaction with passers-by and the mirroring of urban flows. The title of the framework 5x5x5 installation refers to the square aluminium frames composing the kinetic sculpture, but also to the patterns which underlie the generative process. Interaction can take place on several levels. While the movement principle of the sculpture is extremely complex, its consequential design is stringent.

The Touch project, which turned the 4,200 windows of the Dexia Tower in Brussels into a colourful light installation, is also based on the interaction principle. Each window could be addressed individually by means of a touchscreen, which allowed passers-by to interact in real time with the light architecture and take a snapshot of it as a record of their light composition. Touch enabled interaction between individual and public space and triggered discussion about new ways of shaping the urban space. Drawing on the constructivism of an artist like Mondrian, in this project LAB[au] started from abstract and geometric forms - point, line and surface.

Another cycle organized on the Dexia Tower takes a similar starting point. Its title Who's Afraid of Red, Green and Blue refers to American artist Barnett Newman's abstract colour composition. A project within the cycle is conceived as a chronometer and relates light to time, whereby the increase and decrease of light reflects the time of day.

The artworks always take coding as their starting point. As well as projects in the urban space, LAB[au] develops generative art for indoor spaces, like the sculpture SwarmDot. It consists of four computers integrated into a T-shaped Plexiglas column in such a way that the hardware is fully visible and part of the artwork. The screens run a generative software programme which deals with the behaviour of swarms. The unveiled and aesthetic treatment of the work's technical components gives the software object an extra dimension and is very unusual in the art world.

LAB[au] consists of Manuel Abendroth, Jérôme Decock, Alexandre Plennevaux and Els Vermang, who together develop and execute projects and artworks. Unlike the traditional, more hierarchical system – a star and a team of collaborators, as for example with Jeff Koons and Olafur Eliasson – the four members work together on an equal footing. In their collaboration with other artists, which sometimes embraces the fields of music and dance, they are constantly developing new interdisciplinary projects.

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